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## Review: Lara St. John

BY ARTHUR KAPTAINIS, GAZETTE MUSIC CRITIC    MAY 15, 2009

Violin Colours was the title of the Montreal Chamber Music Festival program Thursday in St. James United Church. Lara St. John lived up to the motto by giving the Canadian premiere of Maralinga, an ample but cohesive work by the Australian composer Matthew Hindson.

Named after a nuclear testing site, the piece was more varied and propulsive than most polemical tracts. There were spacey filaments in high position as well as more rugged and rhythmic interludes, plus a lyrical outpouring toward the end. St. John played it all with conviction, and from memory.

The violinist also offered visceral treatments of Ravel's Tzigane and Liszt's Totentanz, the latter in an arrangement jointly attributed to Martin Kennedy and herself. I suppose it could be called revenge for what Liszt did to Paganini. Bartok's Rhapsody No. 2, a blunt number, also went well.

Violin colours were conspicuous by their absence in the first half, which comprised Sonatas by Beethoven's (Op. 12 No. 3) and Franck. However fitting non-stop legato might seem a bar at time, it dampens interest in the long run. St. John should have created more articulation in these works, and tonal shading.

Of course, her piano partner was Anton Kuerti, one of the best Beethovenians on the planet, and no fool in Franck. Kevin Loucks was the fluent pianist in the second half. Festival director Denis Brott showed Art 101 slides. Maybe it is time to let music speak for itself.


Passing notes: The seven MSO players who visited Nunavik last September will play in Santa Monica, Calif., tonight under Kent Nagano. The concert in the Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center will include Stravinsky's The Rake's Progress (with a staging by film and opera director William Friedkin) as well as Alexina Louie's Take the Dog Sled (for throat singers), Bach's Chaconne (with violinist Marianne Dugal) and Stockhausen's In Freundschaft (with bassoonist Mathieu Harel).

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